

To,

7 Dec, 2015

Instructional Quality Commission
Curriculum Frameworks and Instructional Resources Division (CFIRD)
California Department of Education
1430 N Street, Room 3207
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Academic review and the issue on presentation of Hinduism and Indian Civilization in the framework.

I have noted the difficult job the commission has having inherited a framework inherently unfair and biased against Hinduism. It is commendable that the commission has made a commitment to de-center from Europe. The implementation of this however remains to be done.

In the meeting of Nov 19, Co-Chair Bill Honig noted that the direction IQC intends to take is to find a balance between what the Hindu community has been asking and the input of a group of academics (who have made submission led by the name of Kamala Visweswaran), who feel 'caste' needs special mention in the introduction to Hinduism and Indian civilization.

I would like the commission to know how this feels from my view, a Hindu view.

First of all, as I look through the names and bio of the academics, one thing that strikes me is that none of them are experts of Hinduism. Of the 23 members listed, 4 are anthropologists, 11 are scholars in literature, 4 are academics in history of which 2 specialize in Muslim history, 3 are from sociology or politics. Of the teachers teaching religion, they teach Buddhism and Islam. One teacher actually teaches Hinduism, along with folk art and other things, but from what I can tell has education in literature, women's studies but **no Hindu education**. So **none** of these academics have **any real scholarship in Hinduism**.

Secondly, I do not think any of the academics is a practicing Hindu or has any real commitment to the religion of Hinduism.

It is hence no wonder that to a practicing Hindu like me, the input given by these people on Hinduism lack authenticity and come across as absurd and ridiculous. Their input reads very much like General Custer describing the culture and traditions of the Native Americans. It is essentially an orientalist narrative and delivered in a condescending tone. At best it is an academic objectification, through a Western lens, of an ancient and still living tradition practiced by a billion people in the world today. It is a colonialist, orientalist claptrap description of a religion that is unrecognizable to me, and I grew up in this religion. Our complaint from the beginning has been that Hinduism has being singled out for presentation

from an outsider's view and a foreign perspective, while other religions are presented through generous interpretations of their traditions from a practitioner's perspective.

What is worrisome to me is the intent of their letter. The apparent aim is to hoist blame not just on India but **also upon Hinduism for perceived social injustice**. This was also the message of comments by two people—Dr. Chris Chekuri and Mr. Pieter Friedrich, both Christians—at the meeting of Nov19 – **that Hindu religion leads to social injustice. This is essentially the basic problem we have brought to the attention of the commission.** 6th grade is introduction to Hinduism and ancient India/Indian civilization. It is necessary to have a sense of fairness in portraying Hinduism and Indian civilization. **It is unfair and also illegal to present Hindu religious traditions in a negative light.** Hinduism is overwhelmingly presented in a negative way, and when compared to other religions the impact is doubly devastating on children. There has been much worse and wider-spread social injustice in other societies. Europe and Abrahamic cultures have had very rigid class structures based upon birth which have been oppressive. Even lower than the commoners of the European society were the 'colored savages' who were not even considered human and were property for dominion.

Hindu children and children of Indian descent are unable to be secure in their religion or feel pride in their heritage, while children of other religions and cultures are not given a chance to see Hinduism and Indian civilization for what it is.

As a proud Hindu I deeply resent this attempt to vilify my religion and culture. I resent what it does to my children and will do to my grandchildren. I chose to be an American, because I believed in the values that this nation is built upon. However when I see that the same rights are not extended to Hindus and to people of Indian heritage, I feel betrayed and cannot feel a sense of pride in my chosen country.

If a civilization/religion is to be blamed for social injustice, why single out India/Hinduism for this?

This kind of treatment is not given to any other religion or culture. I do not see such attempts at scrutiny of social injustice in presentation of Islam or Christianity. The demands of this group of academics is akin to a group demanding that portrayal of Christianity in schools be tempered by 'scholarly facts on social injustice' and hence Christianity as portrayed needs to be 'balanced' between the Christianity as practiced by the Ku Klux Klan and the Christianity as practiced by much of California Christian community.

The tone of the demands of these academics is very much like saying, "We understand that the commission is under pressure by a group of Racist Christian Supremacists who would like to portray the Christian dogma as something that promotes forgiveness and equal treatment to people, however treating Christian dogma as entirely benign would not do justice to large part of humanity including the millions of heathens, and colored people who

have been oppressed, enslaved and colonized or socially harmed in other ways by it.” As a Hindu I find it offensive that such a direct attack on the religion of Hinduism is tolerated, let alone given a status of “scholarly consensus.” I find it very difficult to understand how the commission feels that points as brought out by this group hostile to Hinduism need to be presented as well.

Indian civilization and Hindu culture has made many contributions to the world, which are for the most part not mentioned in the framework. I do not see these same scholars pointing out this omission. There is a lot Hinduism and India can contribute in the modern context of the world as well. We owe it to our new generation to open their minds to this culture, a rising power in the world they shall work in. Keeping the narrative on Indian civilization and Hinduism in 6th grade centered around orientalist concepts of ‘caste’ and hostile labels like ‘Brahmanism’ is plain wrong.

I can list out the hypocrisy, plain lack of understanding of Hinduism and malicious misinterpretations in the submissions of these academics that are evident to anyone with Hindu education, if that would help. I might do that in separate communication. Some of their claims are really outlandish, to say the least.

Another point I would like the commission to note is that “untouchability” is presented out of proportion and context. Most scholars agree that there was no untouchability in India till 6th century ce, so there is no reason to bring this up in 6th grade or ancient India. Also the percentage of this group was small, ~ 5%. What about the portrayal of the remaining 95%? ‘Untouchability’ is presented as if India was the only place this happened. Such practice was definitely present in Europe as well, if not more prevalent. Ancient India had no slavery.

In order for the framework to guide content publishers in meeting the California state standards for evaluating instructional materials for social content, and the Education Code Sections 51501, 60040(b), and 60044(a) and (b) for ethnic and cultural groups and Religion; investigating how the differences between Asia and the Europe/US are constructed in the framework is necessary. What kind of perceptions and positions are readers encouraged to take up with regard to Hinduism and/or India? The framework should not represent Hindu India to inscribe, maintain, and reinforce colonial messages, through how they present and also through the rather ominous omissions of significant contributions and achievements of Hindu-India in world history

I shall present my specific recommendations when the next draft narrative is released Dec. 15.

Sincerely,

Tushar Pandya
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